



In opposition to airport expansion

By Patrick O'Donnell

What are they thinking? On Sept. 16, the Airport Advisory Commission (AAC) endorsed an airport terminal expansion plan of approximately 90,000 square feet for the Long Beach Airport. They also endorsed the construction of three new aircraft gates and six new aircraft parking positions. Given the need to protect our current noise ordinance and to protect the quality of life in our neighborhoods, I believe the plan is irresponsible. What started as a modernization plan to address the high passenger loads brought on by the arrival of Jet Blue and new security requirements, has grown into an expansion plan that encompasses much more.

I believe that the current AAC proposal would make the new space in our facilities an inviting target for an airline seeking to challenge Jet Blue on their own turf and invite a legal challenge to the current noise ordinance that now limits our commercial flights to 41 a day. How proponents of such a large increase in terminal capacity can argue that this proposal is not about facilitating an eventual increase in the number of flights

leaves me scratching my head.

Every week I ride my bike through the 4th City Council District, connecting with residents. This is an area I am proud to represent. I've heard from residents - young and not so young, some lifetime Long Beach residents and some not - that they knew they were moving next to an airport when they purchased their homes. However, I am also reminded of this city's longstanding commitment to protect the noise ordinance and the homes that lie under the flight path from a challenge that would nullify the current noise ordinance. I see the current 90,000-foot proposal as a chink in the armor that surrounds the city's commitment.

Some argue that we need airport expansion to support conventions, tourism and economic development. However, convention bookings have been on the rise thanks to a new and hardworking team at the Convention and Visitor's Bureau. If the real plan is not to increase the number of flights at our airport, how will the new space benefit tourism? People don't fly to a city because its airport has shopping. They do fly to a city because it has a convenient airport and we already have a convenient airport. Others argue that

we need airport expansion to spur economic development. Show me the numbers - I haven't seen any solid predictions on the number of high wage jobs that will be created or the dollars that will be spent in Long Beach resulting from airport expansion and our investments.

Demand for air travel from our region is growing and some say Long Beach must do its part. I say that we are already doing our part. If the residents of South Orange County don't want a large airport in their backyard, it is not our obligation to build one in ours. The majority of our travelers live and work in Los Angeles and Orange County and expansion would benefit them more than it benefits Long Beach residents.

What makes this plan exceptionally irresponsible is not just that we are putting our neighborhoods at risk, or that there are empty promises, but that the taxpayers may get stuck with a multi-million dollar bill for the AAC's recommended expansion project.

When I decided to run for City Council it was because I had a vision of what I wanted Long Beach to be for residents. It is a vision in which government supports families

and neighborhoods. It was not to witness Long Beach bear the burden of a super-sized airport. Our city leaders have an opportunity to create a healthy and well-balanced vision for the neighborhoods of Long Beach. To bring the focus of our investments and our public policy decisions back to fighting crime, fixing streets and sidewalks, funding libraries and parks. The current AAC proposal threatens our neighborhoods - it doesn't protect them.

I applaud the Harbor Commission for its recent action to reduce the impacts of port growth on our residents. The Port of Long Beach is attempting to balance growth with its impact on the community; the airport should do the same. The residents directly impacted by the airport deserve no less consideration than those impacted by the port. The current AAC proposal does not mitigate impacts on the residents.

I will vote yes to support neighborhoods and communities, and no to super-sizing Long Beach's airport. I urge my colleagues do the same.

Patrick O'Donnell is the Long Beach city councilman for the 4th District.